

THE AMERICAN SOCIETY OF NEPHROLOGY

**LABOR, HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES, EDUCATION AND RELATED
AGENCIES SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE UNITED STATES SENATE
COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS**

**WRITTEN TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF INCREASED FUNDING FOR THE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF DIABETES AND DIGESTIVE AND KIDNEY DISEASES
AT THE NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH**

April 2, 2015

The American Society of Nephrology (ASN) is the world's largest kidney health professional organization—representing 15,000 scientists, nephrologists, and other kidney health providers—and committed to advancing research and treatment options for the more than 20 million children, adolescents, and adults with kidney disease in the United States today. The society requests at least \$2.066 billion in funding for the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK) at the National Institutes of Health (NIH). The society also requests an additional \$150 million per year over 10 years for NIDDK kidney research above the current funding level.

ASN believes these are crucial and necessary investments for preventing illness and maintaining fiscal responsibility. Investing in research to slow the progression of kidney disease and improve therapies for patients would yield significant saving to Medicare in the long run.

In 1972, Congress made a commitment to treat all Americans with kidney failure through the Medicare End-Stage Renal Disease (ESRD) Program—the only health condition Medicare automatically provides coverage for regardless of age or disability. At an annual cost of \$35 billion—more than NIH's entire \$30 billion budget—the ESRD Program represents nearly 7 percent of Medicare's budget even though ESRD patients represent less than 1 percent of the Medicare population. Despite the staggering burden of kidney disease, NIH investments in kidney research are less than 1 percent of total Medicare costs for patients with kidney disease (\$585 million vs. \$80 billion in 2014).

The vast majority of federal research leading to advances in the care and treatment of patients with kidney disease is funded by NIDDK. Examples of critical discoveries arising from NIDDK-funded research are numerous.

For instance, investigative studies supported by NIDDK led to a groundbreaking discovery that helps explain racial and ethnic disparities that increase risks for kidney disease, which can lead to earlier detection and better treatment. The finding that African Americans with two variants of the APOL1 gene are likely to progress to kidney failure faster than other ethnicities paves the way for future research to unlock better preventive therapies and gene-based cures.

Recent findings from NIDDK's Chronic Renal Insufficiency Cohort (CRIC) Study are helping uncover why patients with kidney disease are at greater risk for heart disease, the leading cause of death among patients with kidney failure. Further research exploring the mechanisms for this development could lead to new interventions for preventing heart disease.

Scientists supported by NIDDK have pursued cutting-edge basic, clinical, and translational research. While ASN fully understands the difficult economic environment, the society firmly believes that funding NIDDK is a sound investment to create jobs, support the next generation of investigators, and ultimately provide quality care that is less expensive in order to improve the public health of Americans.

Medical research is a major force in the economic health of communities nationwide: every dollar invested in medical research generates \$2-3 in economic activity. America must continue to capitalize on previous investments to drive research progress, train the next generation of scientists, create new jobs, promote economic growth, and remain the world leader in innovation and discovery—particularly as other countries increase their investments in scientific research. Most important, a failure to maintain and strengthen NIDDK's ability to support the groundbreaking work of researchers across the country carries a palpable human toll, denying hope to the millions of patients awaiting the possibility of a healthier tomorrow.

ASN urges Congress to uphold its longstanding legacy of bipartisan support for biomedical research. Should you have any questions or wish to discuss NIDDK or kidney research in more detail, please contact ASN Senior Policy and Government Affairs Associate Grant Olan at (202) 640-4657 or golan@asn-online.org.

ABOUT ASN

The American Society of Nephrology (ASN) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, tax-exempt organization that leads the fight against kidney disease by educating the society's 15,000 physicians, scientists, and other healthcare professionals, sharing new knowledge, advancing research, and advocating the highest quality care for patients. For more information, visit ASN's website at www.asn-online.org.